

Homer's banquet as he was, he
 remembered that angry
 silence with which the wraith of Ajax turns
 from Odysseus
 in Hades across the meadows of asphodel;
 which Virgil
 certainly remembered when he made
 Dido's spirit turn
 likewise, without a word, from the lover
 who had left
 her to die; and which Longinus has praised
 as an instance
 of those great things in literature whose
 greatness is inde-
 pendent of the form and language of their
 expression. But
 no less fine is the effect in Aeschylus, when
 behind the dry
 crash of the hammers that crucify him high
 up on Cauca-
 sus, endures the silence of Prometheus;
 behind the shout-
 ings that welcome the King of Kings up the
 Argive street,
 the silence of Cassandra. So too, in other
 plays of his
 now lost to us, Achilles sat and brooded
 speechless; speech-
 less, for two whole scenes, sat the
 childless Niobe by
 her slain children's tomb; like a Job drawn
 by Blake, a
 Rachel refusing to be comforted. The
 silences of Sopho-
 cles and Euripides are less titanic; but there,
 too, Eurydice
 and Dejanira steal away to slip the fatal
 noose about
 their necks, without a word; and Jocasta
 likewise, with
 only one final cry. Phaedra, too, speaks not
 a syllable
 to the man for whose love she is dying,
 when they at last
 meet face to face; nor Alcestis to the
 husband who had let
 her die for him, when she comes back
 from the dead.

In the words of that line of Seneca which the Elizabethans were never tired of quoting:

Curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent.

Slight griefs find utterance: agony is dumb.

Aristophanes might mock at the adamantine silences of Aeschylus; but even in loquacious Athens this other art of reticence was also understood.

It may be that necessity helped slightly to mother their invention; on a stage whose tradition allowed only three speaking actors, and so only three speaking parts in